

SOLDIERS' HEALTH

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*Brunton Collection.
Physical Education*

Tracts 1610. (1)

SOLDIERS' HEALTH AND SOLDIERS' DRESS.

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DURING a campaign the number of soldiers who die from disease greatly exceeds the number of those who fall in action. Moreover, a man who falls sick is a greater loss to the army than one who is killed, for he is not only unable to fight himself, but he requires the services of others to tend him, and the conveyance of hospital requisites puts a still farther strain on the transport service, which may already be barely able to meet the requirements of the combatant part of the army. For this reason anything which may increase the health of troops acquires great importance, however, slight or insignificant it may be in itself, and consequently I venture to suggest an alteration in soldiers' dress which I think may be useful.

During the Boer War a friend of mine had a letter from one of his sons who was an officer in a Highland regiment at the front. In this letter the young man mentioned that the Highland regiments had been much freer from intestinal troubles than other troops, and he attributed their immunity from these disorders to the comparative ease with which they were able to evacuate their bowels. The kilt allowed them to do this so easily and quickly that there was little or no temptation to neglect the calls of nature, while the accoutrements of the other troops made going to the rear a lengthy process, and one that was apt to be deferred whenever breakfast was hurried, or any other cause lessened the time that ought to have been appropriated to the business. The constipation thus artificially induced was apt to produce diarrhoea as a consequence. An ordinary soldier affected by this disorder and obliged to fall out

several times on the march in order to attend to the calls of nature, lost so much time in undoing and doing up his clothes and accoutrements that he could not keep up with his comrades, whilst one wearing a kilt had not the same difficulty. In addition to this the plaits of the kilt around the abdomen kept this part of the body warm and protected the intestines from chills.

Notwithstanding the advantages of the kilt in these respects its disadvantages in others led to an order for its abolition, and I began to consider whether some modification in the ordinary dress of the soldier might not secure to him the advantages without the drawbacks of the kilt. This I thought might be done by furnishing the trousers with a posterior flap which might be quickly undone and as quickly drawn up again. On talking the matter over with Surgeon-Major Beevor, he agreed



FIG. 1.—View of breeches from behind with flap raised. A is a waistband to support the breeches. B is a strap with buckle to tighten the waistband as required. C is the flap. G is one of the straps by which the flap C is kept in position.

as to the importance of the object, and he had a pair of breeches made according to the plan which I drew. The tailor had not quite understood my plans, so I had a pair made under my supervision, and these are illustrated by the accompanying figures. Fig. 1 (p. 2) shows the breeches from behind with the flap C up. A is a waistband, and B a small strap and buckle by which it can be tightened as required. The flap is held in place by a strap G provided with a buckle into which another strap F (figs. 2 and 3), fastens in front. Fig. 2 shows the breeches from behind with the flap C down.

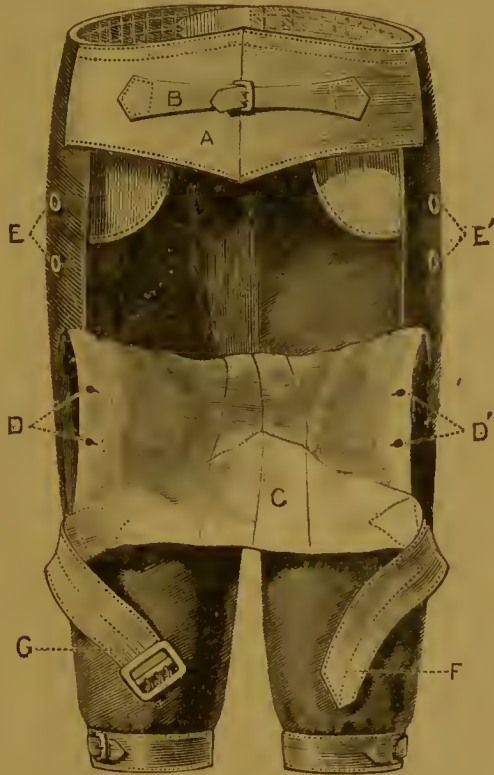


FIG. 2.—A, B, C, are the waistband, strap, and flap respectively, as in fig. 1. D are the button holes and E the buttons by which the flap can be fastened at the sides. G and F are the two straps by which the flap is fastened in front and maintained in position. The side pockets are seen close to E and E'.

During defecation the flap will be kept out of the way by the soldier holding the straps F and G. Immediately the bowels are emptied the flap is raised, the straps F and G are buckled in front and the man is practically dressed again, but the sides of

the flap can be fastened at leisure by the buttons E and button-holes D (fig. 2). Fig. 3 gives a front view of the breeches with



FIG. 3.—View of breeches from the front with flap raised and fastened by the straps F and G, which are indicated by the same letters in fig. 2.

the flap fastened. The straps F and G are made narrow in the specimen pair of breeches, but they might easily be made broader so as to form a permanent camarband, and thus give that protection to the abdomen which is one of the advantages of the kilt. As only one motion, that of unbuckling or buckling the straps F and G is required to undo or refix the flap it can be done in a few seconds, for the buttons can be unfastened and fastened as the soldier is going to or returning from the latrines.

One disadvantage of these breeches is a somewhat increased cost, but this would be infinitesimal if a certain number of soldiers were trained as tailors as in the Russian Army, and each regiment made its own clothes. Such work might be the

beginning of a plan of technical instruction in the army which would enable soldiers to leave the army at the end of their term of service as skilled workmen who could easily obtain profitable employment. I have been told that a somewhat similar proposal in regard to the kind of trousers for the army was made a number of years ago and was laughed to scorn. But with our present heavy taxation the country cannot afford to laugh at any proposal that is likely to increase the efficiency, and so lessen the expense of the army.

